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AUTHOR Miramontes, Ofelia; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The issue of special education services for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students is generally discussed in relation to geographic areas with large minority populations. However, CLD students in less populated areas are also in need of special services. This study reports on a survey that was conducted to determine the perceptions of 533 administrators, special educators, and bilingual/English-as-a-Second-Language teachers of the need for additional training of the special needs of CLD students. Respondents were asked to rate the degree of need for inservice training in four categories: identification and assessment, program planning and curriculum, school/community relations, and other. Results show that although groups differed in their perceptions, the need for additional training in this area is apparent. The needs were perceived most intensely by those charged directly with providing services to CLD students. (MSE)

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# A Survey of Bilingual Special Education Inservice Needs: Perceptions of Educators from a Rural State

Ofelia Miramontes, Leonard Baca, and Nancy Rowch

*The issue of special education services for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students is generally discussed in terms of geographic areas with large minority populations. CLD students in less populated states are also in need of special services. This study reports on a survey conducted to determine the perceived need of administrators, special educators and bilingual/ESL teachers for additional information and training on the special needs of CLD students. Although groups differed in their perceptions, the need for additional training in the area of bilingual special education was clearly established by survey responses. These needs were most intensely perceived by those charged directly with providing services to CLD students.*

The difficulties in determining the existence of handicapping conditions among culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students have been extensively documented (Baca & Chinn 1982; Nuttall et al. 1984). In categories such as learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, and speech pathology, the outcomes of assessment for the determination of a handicapping condition are often inconclusive. As a result, reliance is made on the staffing group's "best judgment." In such cases, the awareness, knowledge, and skills of educators become crucial.

For CLD students, knowledge and skills involve an understanding of two important areas: first, family systems, values, and

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mores, which may be different from those encountered in the culture of the school (Cole & Griffin, 1983; McDermott, 1980; Trueba, 1983); and second, linguistic development for students whose first language is other than English (Cummins, 1984; Miramontes, 1986). Over representation or underrepresentation of CLD students in special education is often the result of limited knowledge about, and experience with, appropriate classroom programs for CLD students (Baca, 1984).

The issue of special education services for CLD students is generally discussed in terms of geographic areas where there are large minority populations. However, the need for appropriate assessment and curriculum planning for such students is necessary wherever CLD students are part of the school population, regardless of the size of the population.

Safeguards for the identification and assessment of CLD students for Special Education are part of the PL 94-142 guidelines for all states. These guidelines require that when a child is evaluated, the instruments used must be appropriate and the testing nondiscriminatory. Assessment instruments must be validated for the specific purpose for which they are used, and shall be administered by trained personnel. Moreover, the development and implementation of the individualized education plan (IEP) must be accomplished with the full understanding and concurrence of the parents, and school districts must make provisions for interpreters, where necessary.

Additionally, for linguistically diverse students, Office of Civil Rights guidelines require that every district conduct language screenings to determine if there is an influence of a language other than English on the student. If such an influence is determined, a language assessment is conducted to determine language dominance and proficiency.

Nebraska is one of the less densely populated states that is working toward providing adequate and appropriate services for CLD students. Of its 977 public school districts, 45 districts reported populations of limited English proficient (LEP) students. A linguistic survey conducted for the state during the 1984-85 school year indicated approximately 1,150 LEP students (Nebraska Equal Education Opportunity Project, 1985). Although 28 languages were represented, 40 percent of this population was Spanish speaking. The next largest language groups represented were Lao and Vietnamese each with 14 percent. Additionally, American Indian students, most of whom do not speak their

tribal languages, are also an important part of the school population. These students are overrepresented in special education classes in reservation schools in the state (NEEOP, 1985), indicating possible misperceptions based on cultural differences.

Although Nebraska has no state-mandated legislation for bilingual education or English as a second language instruction (ESL), the Omaha Public Schools offer bilingual instruction in K-3 for Spanish and Vietnamese speakers. Additionally, Gordon Elementary, in Gordon, Nebraska, has a Title VII funded bilingual program for Lakota Sioux students. Three other districts offer ESL instruction with Hispanic native language instructors. All of the programs are transitional in nature.

## METHOD

In order to determine the perceived need for additional information and inservice with regard to CLD students, a survey was conducted in Nebraska. Three major groups of educators: administrators, special educators, and bilingual ESL teachers were asked to rate items in four categories in terms of the degree of need for inservice training. Data from the survey were analyzed to determine the degree of perceived need for bilingual special education inservice training in a rural state.

## SAMPLE POPULATION

Five hundred thirty five school district personnel representing 39 schools in 21 districts were included in the survey. Only districts with large numbers of LEP students were chosen to receive the survey and specific schools with LEP populations were targeted.

Ten distinct job categories within the three groups were included in the survey. The administrative group was composed of superintendents (12), principals (85), and the directors of special education (18). The special education group included counselors (99), psychologists/diagnosticians (38), speech pathologists (52), and special education teachers (207). The teacher group included English as a Second Language (16) and Bilingual Education (6) teachers.

## SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The three educator groups were asked to rate questions in four categories in terms of their degree of need for inservice training.

The categories were Identification and Assessment; Program Planning Curriculum; School Community Relations; and Other. The Identification and Assessment category explored the need for inservice training on the process of identification and referral, the use of a variety of nonbiased assessment procedures, and guidelines for distinguishing differences from disabilities. The Program Planning and Curriculum items focused on appropriate academic interventions for CLD and CLD exceptional students, and the need for coordination among service providers. The School Community items were directed toward the need to help parents become more active and informed about their children's program. The fourth category, labeled Other, included items on the need for information in first and second language acquisition, special education legislation, and cognitive development in first and second language. Table 1 lists the item for each of the four major categories.

Respondents were asked to rate each item on a four-point scale of perceived need that ranged from "great need" rated 1, and "no need," rated 4. In order to compare the differences in perceptions between groups, responses for each personnel category were tallied separately on each question. Answers were then combined for each of the three personnel groups for the final analysis. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine differences between groups for each question. A Scheffé procedure was conducted to determine specific intergroup comparisons where ANOVAs indicated significant differences between groups.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the data indicated that all groups agreed on the need ("some" to "great") for information on all items in all categories. The perception of need for inservice information in the area of bilingual special education was therefore established. Significant differences were indicated between the three groups of educators: administrative, special education, and bilingual/ESL.

In all but four of the 15 items (1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 3.1), the administrative group's perceived inservice needs were significantly different from those of both the special educators and the bilingual/ESL teachers (Table 2). In each of these cases, administrators saw less need for inservice training than did the other two groups. An analysis of the subgroups within the administrative group (superintendents, principals and special education directors) indicated that for all items, 70-80 percent of

## Table 1.

### Summary of Needs Assessment Categories Evaluated by Survey Questionnaire

| | |
|---|---|
| 1.0 | IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT |
| 1.1 | Identification of LEP students who may be in need of Special Education services |
| 1.2 | Prereferral process of LEP students who may be in need of special education services |
| 1.3 | Referral process for LEP students who may be in need of special education placement |
| 1.4 | Nonbiased assessment of LEP children in special education placement |
| 1.5 | Language assessment testing of LEP students |
| 1.6 | Informal and nontraditional assessment of LEP exceptional students |
| 1.7 | Cultural characteristics of LEP students, distinguishing differences from deficiencies |
| 2.0 | PROGRAM PLANNING/CURRICULUM |
| 2.1 | Coordination of Special Education and Bilingual Education/ESL for LEP handicapped children |
| 2.2 | Educational program planning for handicapped LEP students |
| 2.3 | Curriculum adaptation for handicapped LEP students |
| 3.0 | SCHOOL/COMMUNITY |
| 3.1 | Providing information to LEP parents in the native language |
| 3.2 | Involving parents of LEP students in the special education assessment, placement and program decisions |
| 4.0 | OTHER |
| 4.1 | First and second language acquisition of LEP student |
| 4.2 | Special education legislation and the LEP student |
| 4.3 | Theories of cognitive development and implications for LEP students |

superintendents' responses indicated "no need" for inservice training in contrast to 30 percent or less "no need" responses by principals and special education directors.

In the Identification and Assessment category, the need for information on the identification, prereferral, and referral of LEP students needing special education (items 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3) was significantly less important to both administrators and special educators than to bilingual/ESL teachers. On the other hand, for items 1.4 through 1.7 (dealing with assessment and evaluation *per se*), special educators shared the bilingual/ESL teachers' concerns for inservice training. Inconsistency in the special educators' responses on these two sets of items may reflect their perception of the first three items as being procedural rather than substantive. Their greater familiarity with special education procedures may also be indicated.

## Table 2.

### Summary Data for the Nebraska Bilingual Special Education Inservice Needs Questionnaire

| Item | Administrators Means | Special Educators Means | Bilingual ESL Teachers Means | $df$ | $F$ | Significant ($p < .05$) Group Contrasts* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.1 | 2.73 | 2.39 | 1.77 | 2,527 | 7.50 | 1,2 vs 3 |
| 1.2 | 2.83 | 2.64 | 2.00 | 2,518 | 5.99 | 1,2 vs 3 |
| 1.3 | 2.83 | 2.62 | 1.85 | 2,518 | 7.82 | 1,2 vs 3 |
| 1.4 | 2.79 | 2.28 | 1.68 | 2,515 | 13.21 | 1 vs 2,3 |
| 1.5 | 2.56 | 2.14 | 2.05 | 2,521 | 6.62 | 1 vs 2,3 |
| 1.6 | 2.70 | 2.34 | 1.68 | 2,518 | 10.10 | 1 vs 2,3 |
| 1.7 | 2.54 | 2.13 | 1.82 | 2,520 | 7.92 | 1 vs 2,3 |
| 2.1 | 2.56 | 2.35 | 1.86 | 2,532 | 3.76 | 1 vs 2, |
| 2.2 | 2.60 | 2.30 | 1.82 | 2,527 | 6.38 | 1 vs 2,3 |
| 2.3 | 2.56 | 2.26 | 1.90 | 2,521 | 4.94 | 1 vs 2,3 |
| 3.1 | 2.61 | 2.23 | 2.23 | 2,520 | 5.30 | 1 vs 2 |
| 3.2 | 2.62 | 2.37 | 1.95 | 2,521 | 4.65 | 1 vs 2,3 |
| 4.1 | 2.78 | 2.48 | 2.09 | 2,514 | 6.05 | 1 vs 2,3 |
| 4.2 | 2.94 | 2.58 | 2.14 | 2,519 | 7.80 | 1 vs 2,3 |
| 4.3 | 2.78 | 2.50 | 1.95 | 1,517 | 6.83 | 1 vs 2,3 |

*Note:* Respondents' ratings of items reflect degree of need for inservice information. 1 = great, 2 = average, 3 = some, and 4 = no need.

*Group 1 = Administrators, Group 2 = Special Educators, Group 3 = Bilingual ESL Teachers.

In the area of Program Planning and Curriculum, the personnel closest to the instructional program of the students felt a greater need for coordination, program planning, and curriculum adaptation. There was no significant difference between special educators and bilingual ESL teachers in their perceptions of level of need in these areas.

When School-Community Relations were considered, administrators and special educators were significantly different in their perceptions of the need for providing information to LEP parents in the native language. Special educators reflected a greater need for training in this area. Because of the variance in the bilingual/ESL group on this question, it was not significantly different from either of the other two. The variance for this group is accounted for, in part, by the smaller number of individuals sampled ($N = 22$).

The final category, labeled "Other," related to first and second language acquisition, special education legislation, and the cognitive development of LEP students. Results reflected the pattern of the other categories. Special educators and bilingual/ESL teachers indicated "average" to "great" need for inservice

training on all three items. Administrators' perceptions were significantly different from those of the other two groups, with administrators indicating less need for information in this area.

## CONCLUSIONS

The significant affirmative response by educators for additional information across all categories indicated a need for comprehensive and interdisciplinary inservice training. In states where CLD populations are smaller, and resources may be less plentiful, the need for coordination and interdisciplinary dialogue is particularly important.

In order to accomplish this, inservice programs must offer participants information and interaction at a variety of levels. Inservice programs should provide participants basic background information requiring understanding and articulation across program levels, sessions that specifically address particular specialty groups, and sessions that allow the interdisciplinary interchange of information across specialties. Such sessions can be planned around case studies, which can serve to focus discussions. Participants would then be able to share information and test their skills within a real world context.

The perceived need for inservice training in the area of bilingual special education was clearly established by the responses to the Nebraska needs survey. Additional training in all four survey categories (Identification and Assessment; Program Planning Curriculum; School Community Relations; and Other: first and second language acquisition cognitive development, and special education legislation) was indicated by all three groups. It is evident that even in this low incidence state, educators were very much aware of the need to refine services for CLD students. The data also indicated that inservice needs were more intensely perceived by those who work most closely with students on a daily basis. This finding highlights the importance of communication between administrators and teachers to ensure that classroom needs are met.

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